

Education and Empowerment of Girls against Gender-based Violence

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Abstract

Violence may be defined generally as the mechanism by which unequal power relations are maintained through the infliction of physical or emotional pain on one person by another. However, gender violence takes on a more specific nature that is mainly sexual and which hinges on patriarchal cultures whereby men seek to control, not just the social institutions but also, women's bodies as objects of male sexual gratification. Schools as agents of socialisations may perpetuate such cultures. Using research findings from selected settings of the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR), the author demonstrates how gender violence among young people (female and male) in African formal educational contexts interacts with schooling to produce disempowering experiences for girls compared with their male schoolmates. The thrust of the argument is that, by acting out their gendered and sexual identities in explicitly sensitive, reflexive and gender friendly ways, female and male teachers have the potential to create for their students, violence-free environments in which girls enjoy schooling on equal terms with their male peers.

Because the culture of non-violence is more difficult and hence, requires more attention and more care than that of violence, it takes a great deal longer for the delicious and life-enhancing fruits of non-violence to grow and ripen than it does for the bitter deadly fruits of violence.

-- Muller, Non-Violence in Education

Introduction

Teachers lead gendered lives. Exploring teachers' lives as gendered beings helps us understand how gender influences teacher-learner relationships and pedagogical practices. Such analysis offers valuable insights into a broader understanding of how schools can help empower girls and all children and young people to establish violence-free relationships within and outside schools. In doing this, it is important to examine closely how teachers talk about their experiences as women and men generally. In particular, it is useful to see how they interpret their professional lives, how they perceive their relationships with their female and male colleagues and with the learners in gendered ways. Such explorations enable us to understand how teachers, as gendered beings construct non-cooperation between the genders, and thus enhance or reinforce sexism, sexism which provides fertile grounds for

gender-based violence against girls and women in particular. Based on a series of studies in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR), the author contends that professional behaviour-including that of teachers- is determined not just by institutional cultures and contexts, but also by individual life histories. Individuals' experiences are continually and variably transforming Self and Other through dialogue, within and outside their places of work. (Maclure 1993, also see Potter & Wetherell 1987, p.102) It is in this context that Shotter (1985) argues that "To understand ourselves we must examine how currently we account for ourselves in our everyday self-talk, the procedures and practices we routinely use in making sense of our activities to one another." (p.172)

Only in the late 1990s did researchers in sub-Saharan Africa begin asking questions about how teachers perceive their careers as gendered and sexual beings, and how their perceptions shape expectations of professional roles as men or women in relation to the girls and boys placed in their care. Instructively, the biographical perspective of teachers' gendered lives has attracted research interests in Western countries, including Australia and New Zealand since 1970s. The issues are quite salient to Africa. For example, to what extent do teachers perceive themselves as protectors of children, particularly girls? Do female and male teachers practice non-violence and promote gender-responsive behaviour among their students? Answers to these questions depend heavily on teachers' understandings of themselves, their relationships, personal and professional, and their professional self-concept. As quoted above, the culture of non-violence is more difficult to establish and sustain and hence, requires more attention and care than that of violence.

For purposes of contextualising the discussions, it is important to briefly explore some pertinent conceptual and content issues regarding violence in general and gender-based violence in particular, especially as they relate to education within and around schools.

Issues and Challenges in Addressing Gender-based Violence in Education

Determining the extent of violence against children in schools and other educational settings poses considerable challenges, in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The nature of power relations between children and the perpetrators of violence as well as the fear of reprisals makes reporting a risky undertaking for children. Further, the availability of evidence on violence against children in schools is uneven. Many schools lack mechanisms to document and report such violence.¹ Yet, violence in schools can affect access to schooling, attendance, participation and performance among both boys and girls. The 2006 UN Study on violence against children observes that while children may be exposed to danger on the way to and from school, much more disturbing is the recognition that when they are at school, they may encounter further violence.

¹ See the 2006 UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children in which this author served as a co-consultant with Claudia Mitchell, for Chapter Four on 'Schools and Educational Settings.' http://www.violencestudy.org/IMG/pdf/I. World_Report_on_Violence_against_Children.pdf

The UN Secretary General's study identifies several types of violence. These include corporal punishment and verbal abuse; gender (based) violence; bullying and peer violence; and gangsterism. The boundaries between one type of violence and another are conceptually and practically difficult to separate. For example, corporal punishment and gender violence, or bullying and sexual violence, or even gangsterism and sexual violence are often interlinked.

Apart from this categorisation, violence in school can take many other forms, ranging from verbally abusive comments to the school itself being the target of violence, for example through arson, terrorism, spree-shootings, hostage-taking. With regard to gender-based violence, perpetrators and their accomplices include teachers, school administrators, other school personnel as well as students and outsiders. This makes schools quite risky places for children to be. From Ghana, for example, *Teni-Atinga (2005)* reported the experience of a beginning teacher who witnessed two gang rapes against a girl student. Apparently school authorities did not treat the incident as anything extraordinary:

In the Junior Secondary School I was posted for observation, two incidences of gang rape occurred. The irony is that the head teacher who was a woman with some of the female staff members blamed the girl for everything and failed to protect her or to take legal action against these perpetrators.

Girls more than boys, are raped, sexually assaulted, abused, and sexually harassed by their classmates and even by their teachers. A number of studies in Africa have documented cases of schoolgirls who leave school, or who skip particular classes because a certain teacher has sexually molested them. (see USAID n.d.; *Chege & Mati 1997*; *Pattman & Chege 2003*) The emotional trauma resulting from violence, as well as the trauma associated with missing school and failing academically are significant factors in addressing any form of violence in schools, not the least, gender-based violence. *Human Rights Watch (2001)* reports of fifteen-year-old girl in South Africa who spent weeks away from school because she was scared of the teacher who had sexually assaulted her. She said:

I didn't go back to school for one month after... everything reminds me of what happened. I have dreams. He is in my dreams. He is in the classroom laughing at me. I can hear him laughing at me in my dreams... my grades are horrible.

While the links between schooling and factors such as financial costs, opportunity costs, distance to school, among others can easily be demonstrated, even using statistical measurements, this is not the case with violence, particularly sexual or gender-based violence which humiliates, embarrasses, intimidates and silences children from speaking or reporting. Violence against girls manifests its effects in low enrolment of girls in schools, comparatively poor performance at school, high dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, increasing rates of HIV/AIDS in the 15-24 year old age group and psychological trauma, according to *Coombe (2001)*.

With this silence, violence against children in schools often breaks down trust in the school system. It sometimes has far-reaching effects, damaging the psyche of children, interfering with learning, and more than anything, eroding the potential positive impact that schools can have on society at large. UNAIDS Studies in Southern African countries, including South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe indicate that girls, more than boys, experienced male teachers ignoring them in class, punishing them in sexual ways, insulting or giving them low marks when they declined to offer them sexual favours. (UNAIDS n.d.) From West Africa) a study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the Gambia (UNICEF/Gambia 2003) found a similar link between gender-based violence against girls and schooling.

Violence against girls is not restricted to the classroom or the schoolyard per se. Violence takes place in many places associated with school. Boys are known to ‘colonise’ specific spaces in schools where they act out more violently. Girls who are aware of this avoid those places for their own safety. Toilets have been identified repeatedly in research literature as particularly dangerous areas for girls and also for female teachers.² Finklehor and Williams (1988) claim that the majority of sexual abuses of very young children in nursery schools take place in toilets. In a study of sexual violence in and around schools in Swaziland and Zimbabwe, Mitchell and Mothobi-Tapela (2005) have demonstrated quite graphically that school toilets are danger zones for girls: Seventh grade pupils photographed toilets and categorised them as unsafe spaces. (see also Mitchell and Stuart et al. 2005) Brookes (2003) found that when teachers in South Africa supervised toilets some distance from the school, the incidence of gender violence decreased.

Even the experience of commuting to and from school, according to Chege, Olemba and Rimbui (1995), may differ for girls and boys. This was demonstrated in a Nairobi study which revealed that girls faced comparatively greater risks of sexual abuse than boys before and after school as they commuted on public service vehicles. The vehicles were overcrowded and adult commuters failed to intervene. In some cases women teachers are themselves victims of gender-based violence with the perpetrators usually being male students and male staff members, including some male head teachers. (see Walkerdine 1981; Kirk & Garrow 2003; Teni-Atinga 2005) Arguably, if women teachers are themselves victimised through violence in schools, they are less likely to be effective in supporting and protecting girls.

This kind of gendered violence undoubtedly affects girls’ self-esteem and ability to learn. The situation is often worsened by the fact that parents/guardians are often hesitant to speak out against violence, let alone press charges even in countries that have pertinent legal provisions. A report by Amnesty International Canada (2005) for example shows that many parents were even reluctant to send their daughters to schools because of the insecurity that

² The toilet issue is critical even for female teachers at universities such as mine where the practice is to lock not only the privacy of the individual toilet but also the general hand-wash-basin area to ensure that no unwelcome male intruder waylays the female lecturer as she leaves the toilet. I do that all the time when at the faculty’s women’s only toilets.

includes the risk of abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Millions of children, more than half of them girls, do not attend school while millions of others, both boys and girls, who have access to school drop out, or do not perform as well as they should because of conditions within school. (see UNICEF 2004) The lack of safety and security at school is one of these conditions that push children, especially girls, out of school.

Even so, it is important to acknowledge that schools are probably not the most dangerous places for children and that far more violence against children, particularly extreme forms of violence, takes place outside of school. Indeed, many of those we interview identify schooling and particular teachers as having made positive impacts on their lives. Often, schools are safer than children's homes/communities and their teachers more caring and nurturing. Such reports would underscore the potential of schools and schooling as an enhancer of individual and societal development in multifarious ways.

This paper, drawing on studies from the Eastern African and Southern Africa Region reports the results of in-depth qualitative analysis into the ways in which violence, particularly gender-based violence, is constructed and perpetuated within schools. Ideally, of course, schools are designed to build a future of peaceful, harmonious, gender sensitive and responsive societies. How do teachers as the custodians of society, duty bearers and carers of children, construct their identities, gendered and sexual, in relation to peace and non-violent relationships with their students? How does teacher behaviour enhance or undermine protection from ill treatment and the practices of exclusionary gender-based behaviour? And how do young people –girls and boys – construct their identities vis-à-vis teacher expectations of heterosexuality?

The paper draws on four main studies. 'Finding Our Voices: Gendered and Sexual Identities' (Pattman & Chege 2003), was a cross-country research covering seven countries—Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The others are based in Kenya and include, 'Memories of Childhood Violence...' (Chege 2005); 'Gender Values and Transitions to Adulthood: A study of Girls and Boys...' (Chege 2001) and 'Travelling to and from School in Nairobi: Girls and Painful Matatu Ride'. (Chege & Mati 1997) Apart from "Memories of Childhood Violence," whose sample was drawn from young university student teachers being trained to teach in secondary schools, the studies sampled children—girls and boys—below the ages of 18 years who were enrolled in school.

All four studies engaged both female and male researchers and employed qualitative research approaches in design, data collection methods and analysis. Tools of data collection were selected and prepared with young people in mind. Hence, data included not only the traditional individual and group interviews but also different types of observation--spatial representations (drawing/sketching) and anecdotal narratives. All these were designed to help capture young people's voices as experts in their own experiences. According to Ennew (1994 and 1995) and Hart (1997) hearing the voices of children should be core to any action aimed at improving on their well-being. Sampling was done purposively to include the young people and their significant others from different social backgrounds and covering

different age groups. Although ethically it was not always possible to involve children directly, the researchers located them at the core of the research as much as possible while taking precautions not to further endanger the children and young people through their participation in the studies. (For further details please refer to the studies cited).

Constructing Polarised Gender Divides among Teachers

This research has found that teacher identities are constructed in explicit ways that provide powerful models of femininities and masculinities for both the female and male learners. These models, which students are likely to emulate, place femininities as relatively less powerful than masculinities and open the feminine to labour exploitation as well as sexual violence and abuse. (see Zuberi 2005) Common stereotypes about what women and men can do continue to emerge as important material with which teachers negotiate their gendered identities. According to Flax (1997), the processes of gendering identities are often directed by the interests of men from their position of control over women, sexually and otherwise as is demonstrated in several of the research studies referred to herein.

This is illustrated by an example from a Kenyan primary school located in a ‘slum area’ (informal poor settlements), where a male deputy head teacher made the following statement, in a mixed sex discussion which included a female deputy head teacher of equal rank:

Barasa (male deputy head-teacher): (Promptly) Me... I’m... I’m for division (instant laughter from the other participants) with the belief that specialisation brings about efficiency (...) If I’m given defence (that is, the Ministry of Defence) and then somewhere... hehehe... (laughing) thieves break in, I’ll now have to look... questions will have to be put, and I’ll have to look for answers. And if somebody is in the Ministry of Agriculture then we go hungry, somebody has to explain.

Such a statement reveals how male teachers use division of domestic work as the point of departure in polarising gender in oppressive ways. Using popular local metaphors, the male teacher negotiated a dominant oppressive masculinity in a ‘matter of fact’ way that reflected hierarchical male positions of authority in the school’s gendered establishment. This construction of male teacher identity in terms of violence/armed power (Ministry of Defence) contrasts with that of the female teacher identity in food production (Agriculture). These identities appeared to influence how male and female teachers related within the school and not the least, how the power relations played out and were observed by their female and male students.

Disempowering Girls through Models of Violent Masculinities

As demonstrated by this example of teacher discourse, masculinities were not just constructed as powerful modes of being male but as violent versions of manhood. Pattman and Chege (2003) as well as Chege (2001) found out that girls and boys saw teachers, particularly male teachers, not just as powerful male figures but also as bullies who abused children, physically and emotionally, and who selectively beat the boys more than the girls. Male teachers were also accused of sexually abusing girls. This was often in contrast to female teachers, whom many of the students presented as caring and ‘motherly’. None of the young people appeared to see male teachers as ‘fatherly’. Perhaps fatherliness was inconsistent with care or parenting.

In South Africa, for example, young people in the group and individual interviews described their relationships with male teachers as generally hostile and detached as teachers reportedly seemed to ‘enjoy’ beating the boys, often humiliating them. In their diaries, the boys wrote a great deal about being punished and insulted by male teachers. In Botswana, although both boys and girls were subjected to corporal punishment, punishment was more frequently and harshly administered to the boys. To the South African boys, corporal punishment was such a serious issue that many of them considered it an achievement if they went through one day without being beaten by the teachers. The abuse by male teachers was not just physical but also psychological with boys claiming that teachers referred to them as ‘fools’ who were only fit to become foremen or plantation workers. Some of them said they were made to sing in class as a way of humiliating them in the presence of girls as they produced broken croaking voices, as is natural with most adolescent boys. While many of the boys narrated the feeling of hostility towards male teachers, it is likely that the same teachers represented powerful male role models for the boys to emulate as they matured into men. (Pattman & Chege 2003; also see Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith 2004)

It was clear that men teachers, as a group, appeared to share identities of being violent, intimidating and detached from the learners, particularly the boys. This construction prompted expressions of animosity from many of the boys who felt that male teachers hated them but loved the girls. This was demonstrated in one of the schools in Botswana where boys complained that even when girls committed comparatively ‘worse’ offences, male teachers would still ‘pick’ on the boys for punishment while the girls were treated kindly and easily let off the hook. In a group discussion with Tswana boys, Kgosi, explained that:

Punishment is always harsher for boys than girls...we are beaten on buttocks and girls on hands. Girls are given more marks than boys. Girls are listened to and trusted. Boys are not listened and not trusted. If you are a boy, they beat you first, then ask you to explain later. Girls’ mistakes are always seen as less.

Other boys in the group spoke graphically of how differently and more positively the male teachers treated girls compared with boys:

David: Male teachers usually show bright faces - he is happier assisting a girl than when he is assisting a boy. He smiles when helping a girl; when it's a boy even his mood is unpleasant.

Moruti: Boys are at a disadvantage. When a teacher is bored by something, he says provoking statements just to get at the boys. If a boy says something, trying to reason with the teacher, he is told to 'shut up', but a girl is usually given a good ear.

This differential treatment of girls and boys extended to academic work whereby, in some cases boys were punished for failing to outperform girls, thus eliciting in them a sense of intellectual superiority over girls along with shame at personal performance. This sense of mental superiority was added to boys' perceptions of being physically stronger than the girls as a result of the corporal punishment and humiliations they received. Spender (1982) and other feminist writers are of the view that teachers tend to experience boys as more demanding than girls and, hence, control them during class by providing them more space and attention – and even punishing them more. However, it is arguable that whatever the reasons that drive teachers to construct boyhood and manhood in violent and competitive ways, the effects of developing in them misogynistic tendencies cannot be ignored. Indeed, many of the boys interpreted the harsh teacher treatment of boys as a strategy for keeping the boys from competing for girls' affections. This situation was likely to have adverse effects in transforming the boys into violent abusive men, just like their male teachers. This idea is lent support by a study in India which showed that men who, in their childhood, had observed violence against women, including sexual violence, were significantly more likely to believe that husbands had a right to control their wives and to engage in physical or sexual abuse of their wives. (Martin et al. 2002)

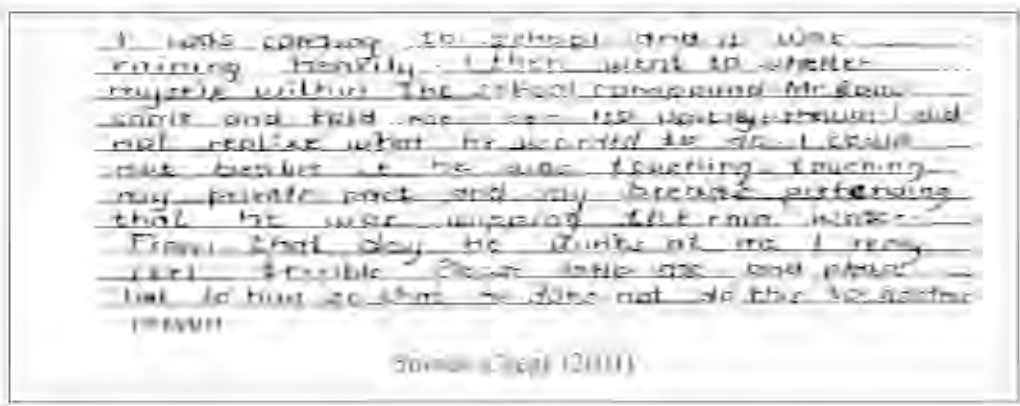
Research evidence shows that corporal punishment and psychological abuse are highly problematic, not least because they mitigate against the possibility of non-violent, peaceful and friendly learner-teacher relations that are essential for healthy relations between the genders and for learning. Further, physical and emotional violence is seen as not only eliciting feelings of bitterness in boys against powerful male figures but also potentially widening the rift in gender relations where girls and women are likely to be positioned as targets of male sexist revenge as the boys mature.

Girls and boys in the studies used the interview space to theorize explicitly about why male teachers were harsher on boys compared with the girls. While a few of the boys hailed the violence as a viable means of toughening boys into real men, many of them and almost all the girls, viewed the gendering of violence as an unwelcome strategy that prepared the ground for gender-based violence including sexual harassment and abuse against girls in particular.

Why Teachers Don't Beat Girls: The Sexual Script

The sexualisation of girls emerged as a major concern in all the research groups, demonstrating how the objectification of girls and the beating of the boys disempowered girls as sexual beings. When male teachers constructed girls as sexual objects, boys were likely to take the cue and construct themselves as girls' sexual predators in-the-making. In this context, many allegations of sexual impropriety were levelled against some male teachers as was demonstrated in a number of anonymous notes addressed to the researcher. In some instances, interviews with girls and boys also tended to digress into discussions on sexual harassment of girls by male teachers. One of the girls in an affluent Kenyan city school scribbled through an anonymous note inserted at the end of her questionnaire as shown in Box 1 below.

Box 1. Anonymous Note Written on the Back of a Questionnaire



The head teacher (male) of the school from which the note came presented himself as unsympathetic to such claims of sexual harassment, which he explained he often received in the school's suggestion box. Covering up for his male colleagues, he effectively condoned their behaviour and problematised the girls by silencing them on sexual violations. Hence, even without him committing sexual offences against the girls, he was implicated by extension in what Salmi (1993) categorises as "Violence by Omission." This sort of violence is characterised by protecting or 'giving a blind eye' to offences committed, thus increasing the victims' vulnerability to the violence. Accordingly, the head-teacher's attitude epitomises what Connell (1996, p.185-6) described as the 'maintenance of practices that institutionalised men's dominance over women' giving men sexual entitlement to women's bodies. Situations of this nature portray a hegemonic masculinity that embodies a successful collective strategy of groups of males perceived to be superior to other males in the school, namely the boys, and clearly to all females. By ignoring the code of conduct for teachers with regard to sexual relations with pupils, the male head-teacher was expressing a form of sexism which, according to Connell, often makes it difficult to see beyond individual acts of force or oppression to a structure of power and a set of social relations with scope and permanence (p.107).

Although many of the girls and boys in the studies complained about violent teachers, it is the sexual violence against girls by male teachers that appeared to disempower girls most. This disempowerment seemed to permeate all aspects of a girl's life including school. It affected social learning as well as academic work. In one of the poor urban schools in Kenya, girls claimed that an incident such as getting to school late was enough for some of the male teachers to stop class in order to objectify the girls sexually, thus humiliating them and making them vulnerable to further sexual abuse by their male peers within and outside class. Some of the girls narrated their ordeals when they arrived late at school, as many did because of domestic chores. The girls said that the teachers were not only unsympathetic but also humiliated them sexually in front of the class by demanding to know whether their lateness was the result of nocturnal activities such as attending discos and having sex. In one of the schools, a male teacher was described as routinely ordering girls to parade back and forth in front of the class, while examining them from head to toe and locking his eyes into theirs in sexually suggestive ways. Based on such parading exercises, the girls alleged that the teacher would award high marks to the girls that he liked. Reportedly, if a girl dared to protest, the teacher would refuse to mark her book and that she would 'obviously' be the 'loser'. In this particular school, the girls accused male teachers of ignoring the boys while spending school time paying sexual attention to the girls. According to one of the interviewees, the girls who paraded and did not complain were allowed to get away with poor performance in class, thus infuriating the boys who had no choice but to work hard. A 13 year-old girl described her experience saying:

Even if the answer from the girls was wrong, he said that it was right. He annoys boys. Boys feel rejected and don't take their books for marking. He says arguing is part of life. He calls one girl, [saying] 'Mwelu, Mwelu, Mwelu is a brown fat girl'. If you talked to him badly, he won't mark your books. He wants to know where girls stay, wants to be their friend. He wants to see your home. He always asks 'Where do you stay?' If he knows, he will come.

This comment encapsulates the perceptions that many of the girls and boys had of some male teachers, who undoubtedly spent valuable teaching time embarrassing girls by "constructing" them as worthless sexual objects. Similar occurrences were reported in Zimbabwe (Tapela & Maveneke 2004; Pattman & Chege 2003), where, for example, one girl and one boy in their mid-teens portrayed their male teachers as sources of anxiety as they sought sexual favours from girls, thus creating fear and despondence among the learners.

Jane: Sometimes you are afraid that if you refuse (sexual advances), the teacher will punish you or fail you, and sometimes you get teachers punishing you by pinching you on the thighs.

Innocent: It is really bad because girls are sometimes afraid that teachers will fail them.

Zambian girls in their late teens echoed similar sentiments regarding the way male teachers used their power to demand sex from girls and to construct them as sex objects of male desire. Boys, for their part, were constructed as inferior males who were not worthy of intimate relationships with their girl classmates.

- Kelita: They [male teachers] discourage us. When they do find you with a boy, they tell you to stop but they are also interested in you. Here at school some teachers propose and, when you don't respond positively, they stop talking to you...
- Charity: Some teachers even give exam papers to finalists - even mock exam papers may be involved.
- Faith: The teachers want something and then they only give girls. It is better to write only what you know in exams, otherwise you become addicted to leakages (and the sexual exploitation).

Sexual abuse and harassment were not confined to urban schools. Rural schoolgirls also narrated similar instances. From a group discussion with girls in a rural Kenyan school:

- C.N.: Female teachers are all right
- FNC: What about the male teachers?
- A.N.: Some (teachers) go after girls from Standard 6, 7 and 8.
- C.N.: Girls can get into a lot of trouble with the young male teachers.
- C.W.: This teacher holds girls' shoulders. They (male teachers) are not fair to other students. They will not beat the girl as compared to others...
- FNC: Do you have to accept this?
- H.A.: You do not have to.
- C.W.: Ukikataa atakupiga (If you refuse he will beat you)
- A.N.: He comes in class and straight to where you sit.
- C.N.: When he holds you, you cannot struggle because we are taught to respect teachers.
- H.A.: If you refuse, he does not want to see you and when his lesson comes, you feel like going out but you can't. Your work then deteriorates because he criticises everything you do.
- A.N.: Some men teachers huchuna mtu nyuma ili wasikie kama ako na bra (pinch you from behind so as to find out if one is wearing a brazier)
- C.W.: Anajifanya anachuna [indicating the stomach area] hata anapeleka mkono kwa private parts (he pretends that he is pinching then moves his hands to the private parts).

From the foregoing, it is clear that classrooms were spaces in which some male teachers constructed themselves, and were also constructed, as sexual predators in ways that their

female colleagues were not. Because of the sexual attention that girls received, boys perceived girls as being ‘favoured’, thus justifying their feelings of animosity towards both them and the male teachers. In this way, the male teachers effectively sowed in the boys negative, exploitative and oppressive attitudes towards girls and women, which were likely to develop into misogynistic tendencies. Further, we note the girls’ dilemmas and sense of powerlessness in responding to sexual violence, a powerlessness that diminished the girls’ confidence as equal human beings with dignity.

In the school cited above, the male teachers notably used the interviews to divert attention from their professional responsibility by engaging in sex talk that tended to legitimate their sexually abusive behaviour towards their female students. This kind of talk demonstrated how men in positions of authority tend to feel obliged to speak on behalf of women and girls even when they lack the experience of being in their position of relative disempowerment. The following teacher interview excerpt exemplifies this tendency:

Mr. Okoli: These girls are mature. The body is disturbing (sexually)... They will start doing these things (i.e. having sex). We should not blame them so much because the world is also treating them like adults.

In attempting to justify the sexualisation of his girl-pupils, Mr. Okoli continued to wonder aloud:

Okoli: What kind of study are you doing when your body is disturbing you? If you are hungry and I tell you to dig? You cannot.

Empowering Teachers to Empower Girls against Sexual Violence: The Role of Memory Work

Violence, including sexual violence, seems to be part of the daily reality for many children in today’s society, both at home and at school. Education can provide key interventions in developing the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to prevent sexual violence against girls. Notably, it is not just the girls and boys who lack what it takes to prevent or challenge sexual violence against girls. Our research suggests most teachers also lack these skills, many lacking even the motivation to empower girls against sexual violence. However, since children spend most of their waking time learning to become citizens, education should play a key role in dismantling sexually abusive tendencies, not just among the pupils but also among teachers, who ought to present themselves as role models in empowering girls against sexual harassment and abuse. (see Boland 1995) For this to happen, educators need, as a foundation, the skills of self-reflexivity on what it means for girls to go through experiences of sexual harassment. Also, for boys to grow up and become gender sensitive and caring, non-violent men, it is crucial that both the female and male teachers learn how to reconstruct themselves as learner-centred educators, who are gender sensitive,

young person-friendly, non-sexist and empathetic to the experiences of their students.

One way of developing this self-reflexivity and conscientisation is to provide space for teachers and student-teachers to 'walk down memory lane', focusing on violence in their childhood. The value of documenting memories is built on the assumption that our identities, gendered, sexual and otherwise, are constructed continually, not just around futuristic and present expectations of Self by the self or Other (Squires 1999, pp.55-56; Oakley 1996, pp.158-159; Alloway 1995), but also through recollections of particular past relations with significant others, in different social settings in the family, school and community. This author used this method, which is commonly referred to as 'Memory Work' (Kippax *et al.* 1990) with female and male university student teachers in a Kenyan university. The activity involved using diaries to record the memories of childhood violence and to note incidents as they trickle into consciousness. Between November 2004 and March 2005, 10 female and 10 male students, many of whom were in their 20s and third year of study, used personal diaries to document their memories of childhood violence. Subsequently, they made reflective notes on what a particular incident of violence meant to them, when it happened in the past, and how they interpreted the incident at the time the memory was recorded. To the extent possible, authors were asked to document any pertinent resolutions they made regarding their future behaviour resulting from the recall and recording process. The student-teachers also intermittently selected a theme in their diaries for group discussion in which they jointly explored and documented strategies for curbing a particular type of violence, be it sexual or otherwise.

Focusing on sexual harassment and its effects on girls, the student teachers were able to reflect and make positive resolutions about curbing this form of violence in their professional practice. The resolutions made were empowering to the student teachers who claimed that never before had they ever been able to confront any violence in their lives the way they did through their diaries. The effect that this approach seemed to have on their lives as teachers-to-be likely contributed to their resolve to empower girls and boys to address sexual violence against girls as well as violence in general. Using Memory Work with graduate student-teachers in Kenya, the author was able to demonstrate not only how the approach validates the accounts of children being sexually violated by teachers but also to bring to the foreground the effects of violence in adult identity formation. The approach also demonstrated that being deliberately aware of the role that gender plays in perpetuating sexual violence and abuse against girls is key to understanding how to develop young peoples' skills to empower girls against sexual violations.

A Glimpse at Memories of Sexual Harassment and Violence by Student-Teachers

Memory work with graduate student-teachers showed that though not as prominently reported as the beatings and verbal violence, the sexualisation of girls, as a form of gendered violence, was a major area of concern. The documented memories confirmed findings in

research with primary and secondary school students, who portrayed male teachers humiliating the boys in class as a way of reducing their self-image and emasculating them. John, a third year university student-teacher, for example, remembered how in secondary school, the male teachers ‘snatched’ boys’ girlfriends and intimidated the girls into having sexual relationships. He recalled that in return for sex, the teachers would assist the girls to pass their examinations as boys toiled away unaided. This elicited in John feelings of bitterness, which he claimed he would not wish to pass on to children in his care as a teacher.

Memories of female students corroborated those of the males regarding sexual exploitation and abuse by the male teachers right from mid-primary school classes, at the onset of puberty. Karen, for example, remembers how in primary Standard 5 and 6, a male teacher placed his hand between girls’ thighs pinching the inner parts. Apparently, this punishment was exclusively for the girls, as boys were punished differently for similar offences. In the words of a female student teacher at the university:

When we were in class 5 and 6, there was a teacher who used to teach us English and CRE, and his form of punishment for boys was so harsh. He would tell them to put their heads under the desks and then pull their shorts so tightly, then beat them several canes on their buttocks, and should they move their hands from under the table, he would increase the strokes. He used to use these pipes for the gas cylinders, and I tell you this was so painful. For the girls he used to put his hands between thighs, caress then pinch so hard, and of course he would take a lot of time with you. He called you in front at his desk then pull you near him and of course the class not watching he would do that and he did this several times and being the harshest teacher in the school, we could not report him and most of us never thought that was a problem at that time (Karen, memories of Standard 5-6).

Nancy narrates her primary school experience of sexual harassment:

I had gone to school one afternoon on Sunday for music festivals preparation when I was in standard 6. I was the first person to get to school. I got into the class where we used to go to practice in. After few minutes, our teacher arrived i.e. the coach. He was very drunk; he greeted me and sat close to me. After few minutes it started raining and there was no other pupil who had turned up. This male teacher started touching my chest but I didn’t have breast. He began caressing me but I couldn’t understand what he was up to, but I remembered my mother had told me not to allow a man touch any part of my body. I started crying. He requested me to go to teacher’s quarter’s house and wait for him there, I refused and I told him that I will inform my father who was a teacher in the same school. After that, he allowed me to go home; I was so worried and harassed. I have never told anyone about it. Afterwards when I grew up, I understood that, that teacher wanted to rape me (Nancy, memories of Standard 6).

We note that in these narratives that both Nancy and Karen are relatively ignorant of what constitutes sexual abuse. They lacked the verbal and physical abilities to deal with these situations, which clearly made them feel violated and vulnerable. Even at university, female students confessed a feeling of powerlessness at sexual abuses from their male peers. Typically, female students felt that they had no voice to defend themselves. This makes them possible victims of sexual abuse in later relationships. Carol's diary excerpt below exemplifies this view:

I felt so stupid and fooled since I could not defend myself. I was a first year in my second semester in Campus. I was going to pick my notes from a course mate (male). It was around 7.30 pm and I had gone to the boys' hostel. I was going to the 3rd floor and up the stairs it seemed a bit dark since some bulbs were not working. On reaching the 3rd floor, a jamaa (a guy) started going down the floor but he seemed to come right straight to me. I thought he was drunk; maybe he had missed his way. I paved way for him but, as I was doing that he got hold of my breasts and squeezed them, then planted his lips on my lips. I couldn't scream since his mouth was on mine. Finally he let me go and said he wished he had gone all the way... he said I wish "ningekumanga" that is he wished he had sex with me. I stood there confused whether to proceed or go back; since I was now afraid of my friend also. I run back down stairs and went to my room. I felt so stupid and fooled since I could not defend myself. I have met this guy even after this incidence and he always comes close to me and reminds me of that day on the stairs. I felt scared even though I had insulted him several times. This incidence made me defer from going to visit friends in boys hostel (Carol, memories of sexual violence at university).

Conclusion

The young peoples' voices, teachers' utterances and alleged behaviours clearly demonstrate how schools have been transformed into spaces where girls are denied equal freedom from sexual violence and the right to become learners on equal terms with boys. Using research-based evidence to capture the voices of girls and boys in their experiences of sexual violence helps to explicitly problematise sexual violence. It also provides critical questions for teachers to develop strategies to combat sexual violence against girls and women.

When teachers were "constructed" as a major source of violence in schools, their professional roles as effective peacemakers is critically called into question. The inability to actualise professional expectations deprives them of their moral authority to transform schools into non-violent places where girls and boys feel safe as dignified human beings. It also challenged their ability to instill in their students gender responsive behaviour that demands mutual respect between the genders.

Memory Work with university student-teachers underscores the need to provide space for self reflection among teacher trainees as well as among teachers currently serving. All

teachers need the ability to critique their role and responsibility in eradicating violence in schools. This ability can be developed by helping teachers reflect on their childhood experiences in school. Self-reflexivity, particularly of sexual violence, has potential to bring adult teachers to terms with the effects that sexual violence has on both girls and boys. This can be seen in the testimonies of the student teachers as cited in their diaries. Such awareness will likely guide teachers in critiquing their behaviour in relation to the opposite sex and in relation to their female and male students. Even as many of the student teachers in the Memory Work Study seemed to denounce general violence and sexual violence in relatively strong terms, such denouncements may be considered as intentions that need to be actualised during their practice as teachers.

Although it is arguably unrealistic to talk about non-violence in schools while violence thrives in the larger society, the narratives of students from different backgrounds and ages in this paper suggest that young people and children do expect school environments, particularly the teachers, to be different. This expectation explains why the young people in the studies expressed feelings of shock and disappointment when they encountered violence, especially sexual violence, from teachers. If the global goals of education as stated in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000) and the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved, it is crucial that schools and educational settings be consciously and deliberately freed of violence, as one of the subtlest barriers to education, particularly of girls.

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